



Exploring Students' Anxiety in Their Speaking Performance in English Learning

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-06-26 Revised: 2026-09-15 Accepted: 2026-09-21 Keywords: <i>English Education students;</i> <i>EFL speaking;</i> <i>qualitative study;</i> <i>speaking anxiety;</i> <i>thematic analysis</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2. 11495 Corresponding Author: Nabila Rizqia Putri Satiri nrizqiaputrisatiri@gmail.com Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, Jawabarat.	<i>Speaking anxiety remains one of the major affective barriers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Although numerous studies have investigated this phenomenon, limited research has specifically explored the experiences of advanced English Education students who are preparing to become future English teachers. This study explores the types, causes, and effects of speaking anxiety experienced by seventh-semester English Education students at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants and systematic classroom observations. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings show that students tend to feel moderately to highly anxious, particularly in impromptu speaking tasks or those led by the lecturer. The main causes include fear of making grammatical or pronunciation errors, and limited vocabulary. High anxiety levels were found to negatively affect students' fluency and self-confidence. However, supportive classroom environments, encouragement, and constructive feedback from lecturers were effective in reducing anxiety and improving speaking performance. The study concludes that fostering emotional support and implementing anxiety-reducing teaching practices are essential for developing students' oral competence and preparing them to become confident future English teachers.</i>

1. Introduction

Speaking is widely acknowledged as one of the most essential skills in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, exchange information, and participate effectively in academic and professional settings. Unlike receptive language skills, speaking requires learners to simultaneously process grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and meaning in real-time communication. Richards (2008) argues that effective speaking involves not only linguistic competence but also the ability to organize ideas and deliver messages appropriately according to the communicative context. For

students enrolled in English Education programs, speaking proficiency is particularly important because they are expected to become future English teachers who can communicate confidently while serving as effective language models for their students.

Despite its importance, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Speaking performance is influenced not only by learners' linguistic competence but also by affective factors, particularly speaking anxiety, which often reduces confidence and willingness to communicate. Aras et al. (2022) reported that difficulties in vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, language processing, and self-confidence frequently hinder students' oral communication. Consequently, many learners experience anxiety, especially when they are required to speak spontaneously or perform in front of lecturers and classmates, resulting in reduced participation during speaking activities.

Speaking anxiety has received considerable attention in second language acquisition research. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), identifying communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as its three major dimensions. This framework has remained one of the most influential theoretical foundations for understanding anxiety in foreign language learning. Recent empirical studies consistently demonstrate that speaking anxiety continues to affect EFL learners across different educational contexts. Erdiana et al. (2020) found that many university students experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety during classroom speaking activities.

Similarly, Damayanti and Listyani (2020) identified fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, inadequate preparation, and low self-confidence as major contributors to speaking anxiety, while Aras et al. (2022) emphasized that speaking difficulties emerge from the interaction between linguistic limitations and psychological barriers. Collectively, these studies suggest that speaking anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by both language competence and emotional factors.

Recent research has also highlighted the close relationship between speaking anxiety, self-efficacy, and learners' willingness to communicate (WTC). Speaking self-efficacy refers to learners' beliefs about their capability to perform speaking tasks successfully, which has been found to influence both anxiety and oral performance. Cong and Li (2022) reported that learners with stronger self-efficacy tended to experience lower communication apprehension and greater confidence when communicating in English. Likewise, willingness to communicate, defined as learners' readiness to initiate communication when opportunities arise, has been recognized as an important predictor of successful second language learning.

Previous studies indicate that supportive teaching practices and positive classroom environments can enhance students' willingness to communicate, whereas higher speaking self-efficacy encourages greater participation in English interactions (Chen et al., 2022; Leeming et al., 2024). These findings imply that speaking anxiety should be understood not merely as an affective barrier but also as a factor that shapes learners' confidence and readiness to communicate in English.

Although previous studies have established that speaking anxiety is associated with linguistic difficulties, self-confidence, classroom participation, self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate, relatively little attention has been given to how these factors interact among advanced English Education students preparing to become future teachers. This population represents a distinctive context because students are expected to demonstrate relatively high English proficiency after several years of formal study while simultaneously developing professional teaching competence.

Nevertheless, advanced language proficiency does not necessarily eliminate speaking anxiety. Greater academic expectations, increased awareness of linguistic accuracy, frequent presentation tasks, and concerns about maintaining professional credibility may continue to trigger anxiety even at advanced stages of learning. Therefore, understanding how advanced English Education students experience speaking anxiety is essential for preparing confident and competent future English teachers.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research question: *How do seventh-semester English Education students experience speaking anxiety in their English speaking performance?* Accordingly, the study aims to explore the types of speaking anxiety experienced by seventh-semester English Education students, identify the factors contributing to their anxiety, and examine how anxiety influences their speaking performance. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined anxiety levels or isolated contributing factors, the present study integrates semi-structured interview data and classroom observations to explain how speaking anxiety influences students' confidence, communicative behavior, and speaking performance among prospective English teachers.

By focusing on seventh-semester English Education students at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, this study offers a more comprehensive qualitative understanding of speaking anxiety within the Indonesian EFL context and contributes practical insights for developing supportive pedagogical practices in teacher education.

2. Method

By focusing on seventh-semester English Education students at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, this study offers a more comprehensive qualitative understanding of speaking anxiety within the Indonesian EFL context and contributes practical insights for developing supportive pedagogical practices in teacher education.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Speaking Anxiety among English Education Students

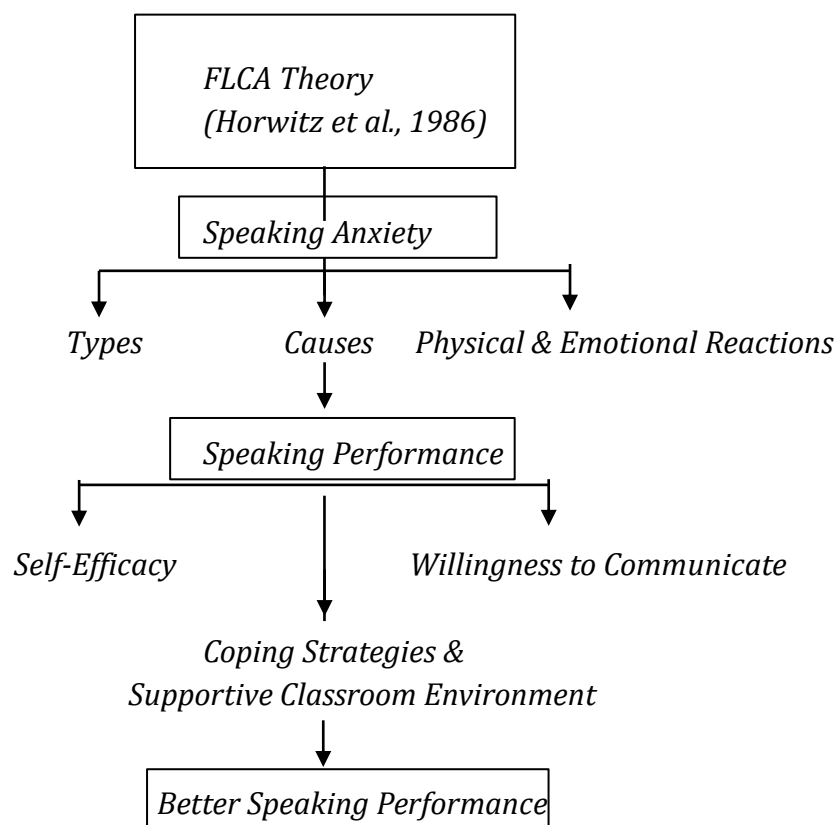


Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the present study. The framework is primarily based on Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) theory, which explains that communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation are the major dimensions of foreign language anxiety. In the present study, speaking anxiety is explored through students' experiences, including its types, contributing factors, and physical and emotional reactions.

These experiences are assumed to influence students' speaking performance, particularly their fluency, confidence, and classroom participation. Furthermore, recent literature suggests that speaking performance is closely associated with learners' self-efficacy and willingness to communicate (Cong & Li, 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Leeming et al., 2024). Finally, coping strategies and supportive classroom environments are expected to reduce speaking anxiety and promote more confident oral communication among prospective English teachers.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the experiences of English Education students regarding speaking anxiety in English language learning. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences related to speaking anxiety within their natural learning context.

The study involved eight seventh-semester students from the English Education Study Program at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active participation in speaking-related classroom activities and their willingness to share their experiences. Seventh-semester students were chosen because they had completed several years of English language study and had experienced various speaking tasks, including presentations, discussions, and microteaching activities.

Despite their advanced level of study, they were still expected to encounter speaking anxiety, making them an appropriate population for exploring this phenomenon in depth. To maintain confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms (P1–P8) throughout the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The interview guide was developed based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) framework proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which includes communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. To ensure content relevance and clarity, the interview protocol was reviewed by the research supervisors prior to data collection. The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions and clarify participants' responses during the interview whenever additional explanation was needed, thereby ensuring that the collected data accurately reflected participants' intended meanings.

Each interview was conducted individually, lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, and was audio-recorded with participants' permission. The interview questions explored students' feelings when speaking English, situations that triggered anxiety, physical and emotional reactions, perceived causes of anxiety, coping strategies, and perceptions of classroom support. To complement the interview findings, non-participant classroom observations were conducted during speaking-related activities, including classroom discussions, presentations, and microteaching sessions. Observable indicators of speaking anxiety, such as hesitation, avoidance of eye contact, trembling voice, nervous gestures, and classroom participation patterns, were documented through field notes. The observation data provided contextual evidence that supported and enriched the interview findings.

The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The analysis followed six phases: familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes, generation of initial codes, searching for potential themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Interview transcripts and observation field notes were analyzed concurrently to identify recurring patterns that represented participants' experiences of speaking anxiety.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating evidence obtained from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The consistency between participants' verbal accounts and their observable classroom behaviours strengthened the credibility of the identified themes. During the interviews, the researcher also conducted immediate clarification and follow-up questioning whenever participants' responses required further explanation, ensuring that the interpretations accurately reflected their intended meanings. In addition, detailed field notes were maintained throughout the observation process to provide contextual information that supported data interpretation.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Written and verbal informed consent was obtained before the interviews and classroom observations were conducted. To ensure confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms (P1–P8), and all interview recordings and research data were used solely for academic purposes.

3. Result

Interview transcripts and classroom observation notes were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The analysis generated five interconnected themes describing students' experiences of speaking anxiety: (1) types of speaking anxiety, (2) causes of speaking anxiety, (3) physical and emotional reactions, (4) the impact of anxiety on speaking performance, and (5) coping strategies.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes Identified from the Data

Theme	Subthemes
Types of Speaking Anxiety	Moderate anxiety, high anxiety, anxiety during spontaneous speaking
Causes of Speaking Anxiety	Fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation
Physical and Emotional Reactions	Nervousness, trembling voice, increased heartbeat, overthinking
Impact on Speaking Performance	Hesitation, reduced fluency, avoidance behaviour, limited classroom participation
Coping Strategies	Preparation, self-practice, positive self-talk, supportive classroom environment

Note. The themes and subthemes were generated through thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview transcripts and classroom observation notes following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework.

Table 2. Distribution of Themes Across Participants

Theme	Participants Mentioning the Theme
Types of speaking anxiety	8/8
Fear of making mistakes	8/8
Fear of lecturer evaluation	7/8
Limited vocabulary	6/8
Physical and emotional reactions	8/8
Coping strategies	8/8

Note. The table indicates the number of participants who reported each theme during the semi-structured interviews. The frequencies are presented only to illustrate the prevalence of themes and do not imply statistical generalization, as the study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach.

Types of Speaking Anxiety

All participants reported experiencing speaking anxiety, although the intensity varied depending on the speaking situation. Anxiety was most frequently experienced during spontaneous speaking activities, classroom presentations, and lecturer-supervised speaking tasks. Participants explained that being asked to speak unexpectedly made them feel unprepared and afraid of making mistakes.

One participant stated:

"I feel most anxious when I am asked to speak suddenly by our lecturer because I'm scared that I have pronunciation mistakes." (P7)

Similarly, another participant explained:

"Honestly, I often feel nervous and tense... sometimes I forget the right words when everyone is looking at me." (P8)

These statements were consistent with the classroom observations. Several participants hesitated before speaking, avoided eye contact, paused frequently, and showed visible nervousness during spontaneous classroom discussions and presentations.

Although anxiety levels differed among participants, spontaneous speaking tasks consistently emerged as the most anxiety-provoking situation.

Causes of Speaking Anxiety

Participants identified several interconnected factors contributing to their speaking anxiety. The most frequently mentioned causes included fear of making grammatical and pronunciation mistakes, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, and fear of negative evaluation from lecturers and classmates.

One participant explained:

"I think my anxiety mostly comes from the fear of making mistakes and being judged." (P8)

Another participant reported:

"Sometimes I know the vocabulary, but I'm not sure how to pronounce it correctly." (P8)

Similarly, another participant noted that inadequate confidence made speaking more difficult even after preparation.

Observation findings supported these responses. Students with higher levels of anxiety tended to avoid volunteering answers, relied heavily on notes, and spoke only when directly invited by the lecturer. These findings suggest that speaking anxiety originated from both linguistic concerns and students' perceptions of how their performance would be evaluated.

Physical and Emotional Reactions

Speaking anxiety was reflected through both physical and emotional responses. Participants commonly described nervousness, increased heartbeat, trembling voices, overthinking, embarrassment, and difficulty concentrating before or while speaking.

One participant stated:

"My hands usually get a bit cold, and my heart beats faster." (P8)

Another participant explained:

"When I'm anxious, I tend to avoid eye contact. My voice becomes lower, and sometimes I speak too fast." (P8)

These experiences corresponded closely with the observation data. During classroom presentations, several participants displayed trembling hands, prolonged pauses, nervous smiles, and frequent glances at their notes before continuing to speak. Such behavioural indicators demonstrated that speaking anxiety affected participants not only emotionally but also physiologically.

Impact on Speaking Performance

Participants consistently perceived that speaking anxiety reduced their speaking performance. Anxiety caused hesitation, disrupted fluency, increased the use of fillers, and limited classroom participation despite participants having sufficient knowledge of the discussion topics.

One participant stated:

"Because of anxiety, I cannot show my real ability in speaking English." (P8)

Another participant reported:

"Sometimes, I forget my ideas even though I've practiced many times." (P7)

Observation findings confirmed these perceptions. Students who appeared more anxious frequently paused before responding, simplified their sentences, and participated less actively during discussions. These findings indicate that speaking anxiety influenced

participants' ability to demonstrate their actual communicative competence.

Coping Strategies

Although participants experienced anxiety, they also developed various strategies to reduce it. The most common strategies included preparing presentation materials, rehearsing repeatedly, practicing with friends, recording themselves before presentations, using positive self-talk, and taking deep breaths before speaking.

One participant explained:

"I usually prepare by practicing with my friends or recording myself before a presentation." (P8)

Another participant stated:

"I usually memorize the main points and practice the presentation with my close friends first."
(P7)

Observation findings also showed that participants who appeared well prepared generally demonstrated greater confidence during speaking activities. In addition, supportive responses from lecturers and classmates were consistently associated with lower levels of anxiety. Students appeared more relaxed after receiving encouragement, positive feedback, or approval from their peers, suggesting that preparation and supportive classroom interactions played important roles in helping students manage speaking anxiety.

4. Discussion

Speaking Anxiety among Advanced English Education Students

The present study demonstrates that speaking anxiety remains a common experience among seventh-semester English Education students despite their advanced level of English learning. This finding suggests that speaking anxiety does not automatically diminish as students progress academically or develop greater linguistic competence. Instead, participants continued to experience anxiety, particularly during spontaneous speaking activities and lecturer-supervised presentations, where they perceived greater pressure to perform accurately. As prospective English teachers, the participants appeared to hold higher expectations of themselves, making them more sensitive to mistakes in grammar, pronunciation, and language use.

These findings reinforce Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) framework, which explains that communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety remain central sources of anxiety in foreign language learning. Although the participants had completed several years of English study, psychological concerns continued to interfere with their confidence when communicating orally. This finding is consistent with Erdiana et al. (2020), who reported that university students frequently experience moderate levels of speaking anxiety despite having relatively advanced English proficiency. Likewise, Damayanti and Listyani (2020) argued that speaking anxiety is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by learners' confidence and perceptions of classroom evaluation.

More importantly, the present findings indicate that speaking anxiety should not be interpreted solely as evidence of limited language ability. The interview and observation data revealed that many participants possessed sufficient knowledge to express their ideas but became hesitant once they felt worried about making mistakes or being judged by others. This finding supports Aras et al. (2022), who emphasized that successful oral communication is influenced by the interaction between linguistic competence and psychological readiness.

Therefore, improving speaking proficiency alone may not sufficiently reduce anxiety unless emotional aspects of language learning are also addressed.

Speaking Anxiety, Self-Efficacy, and Willingness to Communicate

A central finding of this study is the negative relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance. Participants consistently described becoming less fluent, more hesitant, and less confident when experiencing anxiety, even though they understood the discussion topics and had prepared themselves beforehand. This indicates that anxiety affected students' ability to demonstrate their actual communicative competence rather than reflecting deficiencies in their language knowledge.

This finding supports Horwitz et al.'s (1986) proposition that foreign language anxiety interferes with learners' cognitive processing during communication. When students become excessively concerned about grammatical accuracy or possible negative evaluation, part of their cognitive resources is redirected toward monitoring mistakes instead of producing meaningful speech. Consequently, anxiety reduces fluency, increases hesitation, and limits active classroom participation.

The findings may also be interpreted from the perspective of self-efficacy, which refers to learners' beliefs about their capability to successfully perform a particular task. Several participants demonstrated that even after preparing their presentations, they still doubted their own ability to speak English confidently. Such self-doubt suggests that students' perceptions of their competence may be as influential as their actual language proficiency. Cong and Li (2022) similarly found that learners with stronger speaking self-efficacy generally experience lower communication apprehension and are more capable of managing language anxiety. More recently, Leeming et al. (2024) reported that speaking self-efficacy is one of the strongest predictors of second language spoken task performance, highlighting the important role of confidence in successful oral communication.

The findings also relate closely to the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which refers to learners' readiness to initiate communication when opportunities arise. Throughout the interviews and classroom observations, participants who experienced greater anxiety tended to avoid volunteering answers, limit their participation in discussions, and wait until they were directly invited to speak. These behaviours indicate that speaking anxiety may reduce learners' willingness to communicate even when they possess adequate language knowledge.

Previous studies have similarly demonstrated that willingness to communicate is strongly associated with learners' confidence and classroom experiences. Saka and Merċ (2021) found that students with higher linguistic self-confidence and stronger self-efficacy were more willing to communicate in English. Likewise, Wang et al. (2023) reported a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and willingness to communicate, suggesting that confident learners are more likely to engage actively in oral interaction. Furthermore, Qu (2023) argued that greater willingness to communicate contributes to improved language proficiency because students obtain more opportunities to practice authentic communication. Therefore, the present findings indicate that speaking anxiety not only affects speaking performance directly but may also reduce students' willingness to communicate, which ultimately limits opportunities for language development.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for English language teaching, particularly in English Education programs that prepare prospective teachers. Since speaking anxiety arises from both linguistic and psychological factors, classroom

instruction should address these dimensions simultaneously. Improving students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking fluency is essential, but these efforts should be accompanied by instructional practices that foster confidence, reduce fear of negative evaluation, and encourage active participation.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of supportive classroom environments where mistakes are treated as part of the learning process rather than as failures. Constructive lecturer feedback, encouragement, pair discussions, and small-group speaking activities appeared to create psychologically safer learning situations that gradually increased students' confidence. These findings are consistent with Chen et al. (2022), who concluded that teachers' instructional approaches significantly influence learners' willingness to communicate. Similarly, Zarrinabadi et al. (2021) argued that autonomy-supportive teaching encourages positive language beliefs and promotes students' communicative confidence in EFL classrooms.

For teacher education programs, these findings carry broader significance. As future English teachers, students are expected not only to master English but also to communicate confidently while facilitating classroom interaction. If speaking anxiety remains unresolved, it may continue to influence their teaching confidence and professional performance. Therefore, teacher education programs should integrate regular communicative practice with supportive pedagogical approaches that strengthen students' self-efficacy and willingness to communicate alongside their linguistic competence.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on foreign language speaking anxiety by demonstrating that anxiety remains a multidimensional phenomenon even among advanced English Education students. While Horwitz et al.'s (1986) FLCA framework continues to explain the psychological dimensions of speaking anxiety, the present findings further suggest that self-efficacy and willingness to communicate provide complementary perspectives for understanding why anxiety continues to influence learners' speaking performance despite relatively advanced language proficiency. Together, these findings highlight that successful oral communication depends not only on what learners know about the language but also on how confidently they believe they can use it in authentic communicative situations.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of speaking anxiety among seventh-semester English Education students at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang using a qualitative descriptive approach. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety remains a significant affective challenge even among advanced English Education students. Participants experienced varying levels of anxiety, particularly during spontaneous speaking activities, classroom presentations, and lecturer-supervised speaking tasks. The major factors contributing to anxiety included fear of making grammatical and pronunciation mistakes, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, and fear of negative evaluation from lecturers and peers.

The findings further demonstrate that speaking anxiety negatively influences students' speaking performance by reducing fluency, increasing hesitation, and limiting classroom participation. Importantly, the study suggests that these difficulties do not necessarily reflect students' actual language proficiency. Rather, anxiety interferes with learners' confidence and willingness to communicate, preventing them from fully demonstrating their communicative competence. This finding supports the view that speaking performance is influenced not only by linguistic knowledge but also by psychological factors such as self-efficacy and learners' readiness to engage in communication.

The study also highlights the important role of supportive learning environments in reducing speaking anxiety. Constructive lecturer feedback, opportunities for repeated speaking practice, collaborative learning activities, and positive classroom interactions were perceived as valuable in strengthening students' confidence and encouraging active participation. These findings suggest that anxiety-reducing pedagogical practices should become an integral part of English language teaching, particularly in teacher education programs that prepare prospective English teachers.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research involved only eight participants from one English Education program at a single Indonesian university; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL contexts. In addition, the study focused on participants' perceptions obtained through interviews and classroom observations without examining changes in anxiety over time.

Future studies are recommended to involve participants from different universities or educational contexts, employ longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches, and further investigate the relationships among speaking anxiety, self-efficacy, willingness to communicate, and speaking performance. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how affective factors shape learners' oral communication and could contribute to the development of more effective pedagogical strategies for reducing speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms.

6. Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Dr. Sidik Indra Nugraha, S.Pd., M.Pd., as the first supervisor, and Fela Dafitri, M.Pd., as the second supervisor, for their invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, continuous encouragement, and insightful suggestions throughout the completion of this research. Their expertise and support have greatly contributed to the development and improvement of this study.

The author also extends appreciation to the seventh-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang who willingly participated in this study and shared their valuable experiences. Finally, sincere thanks are addressed to everyone who provided support and encouragement during the completion of this research.

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